

For Immediate Release

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American Imam Shares Message of Tolerance and Dialogue

For Mohamed Bashar Arafat, an Imam based in Baltimore, Maryland, the holy month of Ramadan was the perfect time to visit Doha and share his experiences as an American Muslim. Speaking to hundreds of Qataris and expatriates from all walks of life, Arafat promoted the values of tolerance and religious freedom as enshrined in the Holy Qu'ran and the U.S. Constitution.

U.S. Ambassador Joseph LeBaron, in remarks delivered in Arabic at the Amna Bint Wahab School for Girls, told the audience that Imam Arafat had established the Citizens Exchange and Cooperation Foundation in order to further his strong belief in interfaith dialogue as a means to promote understanding between the United States and Muslims in other countries. With more than 2,000 mosques and several million Muslims freely practicing their faith in the United States, the Citizens Exchange and Cooperation Foundation believes the United States is an important part of the Muslim world, Ambassador LeBaron said.

The Imam answered some searching questions about Muslims in America during his September 16-18 visit, including one from a student at the Al Wakra Preparatory School for Girls, who asked if Muslim women were allowed to wear hijabs at work. Pointing to the Cultural Attaché from the American Embassy in Doha, Arafat said, "Here is an American Muslim working for the U.S. Government, and she's wearing a hijab." Many students were surprised to learn that American Muslims, including Muslim women who wear the hijab, enjoy rights equal to all other American citizens.

Arafat visited three other schools and spoke during Taraweeh prayers at three large mosques, including the FANAR center. In true Qatari style, Imam Arafat was also warmly received at the Doha Youth Center, where he implored his young audience to work together with Americans towards greater understanding through interfaith dialogue.



Photo Captions:

(Left) Imam Arafat at Al Wakra Preparatory School for Girls with English teacher Jeehan Abdullah and U.S. Embassy Cultural Attaché Mahvash Siddiqui.

(Right) Imam Arafat addressing students at the Khalifa School for Boys.



Photo Captions:

(Left) Imam Arafat speaking at the Amna Bint Wahab School for Girls.

(Right) Imam Arafat listening to Omar Mortaja speak about his experience as an exchange student in America.



Photo Captions:

(Left) Imam Arafat with Imam Abdulsalam Basyuni at the Abu Bakr al-Sadiq Mosque.

(Right) Imam Arafat addressing students at the Omar Ibn Khattab School.